

## Book Reviews

**Sambia Sexual Culture: Essays From the Field.** By Gilbert Herdt. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1999, 327 pp., \$20.00.

*Reviewed by James Giles, Ph.D.*<sup>1</sup>

One culture whose sexual practices have received much attention in both the social anthropological and sexual literature is the Sambia tribe of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The fieldwork on the Sambia sexual culture was carried out by Herdt in the 1970s and later presented by him in a series of essays. These essays, in slightly revised form and with a new introduction, have at last been brought together in this volume. Despite the fact that the book is a collection of essays, they fit well together and the book reads much like a single work.

The aspect of Sambia sexual culture on which Herdt focuses, and the one that has generated the most interest, is the culturally prescribed period of male homosexuality that takes place prior to the Sambia male's heterosexual marriage. Although culturally prescribed homosexuality has long been studied in the various other cultures of Melanesia (Davenport, 1965, 1977; Deacon, 1934; van Baal, 1966), Sambia sexual culture has received special attention because Herdt argues that the sexual behavior of the Sambia shows how profoundly Sambia sexual desires—and thus, by implication, sexual desires in any culture—are conditioned by historical and cultural influences. Herdt's view is in contrast to those of many of the earlier Melanesian ethnographers, who saw such homosexual activity as being merely "institutionalized" or "ritualized" and thus not as being indicative of the participant's actual sexual desires. Herdt, however, argues that the Sambia who engage in the prescribed homosexual activities are not merely doing so because it is ritually prescribed, but are rather doing so because of genuine homosexual desires that their culture has, through "deep scripting," implanted in them. As Sambia boys become young men, their culture then, through similar scripting, gets them to give up their homosexual desires and acquire heterosexual ones. But why does Herdt think all this? To

find out, let us have a close look at Sambia-prescribed homosexuality.

This homosexuality involves young boys performing fellatio on older adolescent boys and takes place in a complex web of beliefs concerning female pollution and the masculinizing properties of semen. Sambia, whose culture contains a high amount of antagonism between the genders, believe that a boy must be removed from his mother at about the age of 9 in order to avoid female pollution and must start ingesting semen through fellatio. Although girls are thought to develop naturally into fully functioning women, boys, having no semen of their own, are thought to require the semen of other males to develop. Even though boys are assigned at birth to the male gender because of their genitals, it is believed that they will not be able to produce their own semen without first ingesting the semen of older boys. This ingestion is believed to be essential for developing strong bones and muscles, male secondary sex characteristics, and reproductive competence. Consequently, prepubescent Sambia boys perform fellatio on older boys until they themselves reach puberty and, in turn, start themselves being fellated by younger boys. This sort of homosexual activity, however, comes in most cases to an abrupt halt with the young man's marriage in his late teens or later. Here Sambia culture now prescribes exclusive heterosexual behavior for the male and his wife (usually involving sexual intercourse, but also heterosexual fellatio).

In appraising Herdt's interpretation of Sambia sexual behavior, it is important to note that there is nothing strange about the Sambia sex acts in themselves: the act of fellatio, in either its homosexual or heterosexual forms, is not peculiar to the Sambia. Acts of fellatio of both types are depicted in various art forms throughout the world, discussed in the ancient Indian and Chinese erotic works, and are not an uncommon practice in contemporary Western culture (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Likewise, there is nothing odd about the Sambia practice of adult sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse between adults is practised in all cultures. Thus, what has caused so much interest is not the Sambia sexual acts themselves, but rather the fact that nearly all Sambia males shift from exclusive homosexual behavior to exclusive heterosexual behavior at a culturally prescribed time. If Herdt's interpretation of this shift in behavior is right, it seems to be a

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case where a person's—or, to be more precise, a male's—sexual desires suddenly shift their orientation (from homosexual to heterosexual) according to the prescriptions or “scripts” of his culture. This goes against the view of many sexologists that sexual orientation is not a superficial preference that can be culturally manipulated at various points in a person's life, but is rather a basic part of the individual's psychic constitution that is crystallized in early childhood (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981; Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991; Kaplan, 1995).

Although it might be tempting to see the *Sambia* case here as a form of bisexuality—and thus as something that is not too distinct from bisexuality in Western culture—the *Sambia* case is different in important ways. For bisexual behavior usually refers to a person's engaging, of his or her own accord, in both heterosexual and homosexual behavior during the same period of his or her life, typically going back and forth between the two types of activity. In *Sambia* culture, however, there tends to be a period of exclusive homosexual activity that is then followed by a sudden shift to exclusive heterosexual activity. Further, and more importantly for the current discussion, this shift in sexual activity is something that is culturally prescribed and engaged in by nearly all male members of the culture. But does such behavior show that *Sambia* culture has dictated the orientations that the sexual desires of its males are to take? Herdt thinks so. As he puts it, “*Sambia* sexual culture fundamentally split apart desires, gendered them, and made sexual practices and sociosexual objects the instrumentality of their culture and power structures” (p. 7). Herdt himself is quite impressed with *Sambia* sexual practices and says that they unalterably changed his views of sexual desire.

A close reading of Herdt's work, however, shows that there is no reason to think that sexual desires of the *Sambia* are “split apart” and “gendered” by the rituals to which Herdt refers and that any purported influences here come from a biased interpretation on Herdt's part that has no basis in the data. This is because Herdt's claims about the sexual desires of the *Sambia* are founded almost exclusively on their sexual behavior and betray little concern for any nonsexual desires that might motivate the behavior. But as is well known, sexual behavior can be engaged in for numerous reasons, many of which have nothing to do with sexual desire (Giles, 2004). This fact is especially important to be aware of when one is studying the sexual desires of people from a sexually nonpermissive and prescriptive culture like that of the *Sambia*. To get an idea of how *Sambia* sexual desires might diverge from their sexual behavior, let us start by examining how *Sambia* boys are led to their first homosexual practices.

As we have just seen, young *Sambia* boys are removed, sometimes forcibly, from their mothers. This can involve the wailing of mothers and death threats to the child made by the abducting men. Once taken from their mothers, the boys are then beaten with switches, after which they have sharp sticks driven up their noses until they bleed profusely (to remove the female pollution), and are then whipped with stinging nettles. Some of the men then dress the boys in clothing that signals their new status as fellators, while others try to humiliate the boys by laughing at them and making lewd comments and jokes about what they will soon have to do. At this point, other men appear in warrior paint and costumes playing bamboo flutes which symbolize, among other things, the penis. A man then goes down the line of the boys trying to insert the flute into their mouths and getting them to suck it. Refusal to suck the flute is sometimes met with verbal intimidation, threats (e.g., with a machete), and violence (being struck hard with the flute), while a boy's compliance meets much praise and approval. Despite all of this, about half the boys still refuse to suck the flute. The boys then receive lectures from high-status elders about the importance of performing fellatio and drinking semen for a boy who wants to grow and become strong. They are forbidden to touch or even look at females until they marry and are also threatened with castration if, when they later marry, they sleep with another man's wife. At this point, the boys are then led back to a cult house where costumed older boys, said to be female spirits, dance, making sexual gestures before the younger boys as the night approaches. This is done in the presence of older men who once again tell the young boys they must perform fellatio; any remark or noise from the young boys could here provoke a thrashing from the men. These dancers then take the younger boys out on to a darkened dance ground where the younger boys perform fellatio on them. Again, not all the younger boys (and not all the older boys) take part.

It is, of course, hardly noteworthy that a 9-year-old child who is subjected to such coercion, violence, threats, humiliation, and lectures by authority figures—a procedure which Herdt himself likens to brainwashing—acquiesces to carry out the prescribed activity. What is noteworthy is that, despite the bullying and intimidation, some boys are nevertheless able to resist the “sexual practices and sociosexual objects” that are “the instrumentality of their culture and power structures.” Further, it is just this patent coerciveness of the entire ritual that should make us suspicious of claims that the homosexual activities performed during or as a result of the ritual in any way reflect the participant's real sexual desires. Yet, in reading Herdt's presentation of the material, it is easy to be misled and think that the *Sambia* boys' sexual activities

are representative of their sexual desires. One of the reasons for this is Herdt's choice of terminology to describe the prescribed sexual activity. Thus, instead of referring to their sexual acts as *homosexual* activity, he continually refers to them as *homoerotic* activity or *homoeroticism*. But, as Herdt himself is aware, the term "homoerotic" implies the existence of homosexual desire in a way that the term "homosexual" does not. If, for example, someone is coerced into performing a homosexual act for which he has no sexual desire, it is nevertheless true to say that he engaged in homosexual activity. This is because the term "homosexual activity" signifies merely the nature of the physical activity and need carry no implications with it about the person's desires. If, however, we try to describe the same situation by saying that the coerced person engaged in *homoerotic* activity or showed *homoeroticism*, then we are introducing unwarranted implications into our description, namely that he sexually desired or sexually enjoyed the activity. This is because terms with the root "erotic" imply a connection to sexual desire. In Herdt's own words, the term "erotic" "refers specifically to that which stimulates sexual desire and arousal" (p. 65), with the term "homoerotic" referring to a person's "preferred, intentional, desire" (p. 295). Consequently, it is begging the question to refer, as Herdt does, to *Sambia* prescribed homosexual acts as *homoerotic* or *homoeroticism* unless it has already been shown that such acts are based on, connected to, or stimulate sexual desire.

But nowhere in all of Herdt's data is this ever shown. What we are given rather is simply descriptions of the *Sambia* sexual rituals and sexual behavior. But this is hardly enough to show that the desires that motivate the behavior are erotic desires. Indeed, the fact that *Sambia* boys have to be coerced and beaten into performing the homosexual activities required of them, along with the fact that the majority of *Sambia* males require no coercion to engage later in heterosexual activity, and—despite the high amount of gender antagonism and fears of female pollution—find heterosexual intercourse intensely exciting and pleasurable (p. 156), clearly suggest that the prescribed childhood and adolescent homosexual acts are not motivated in any great way by homosexual desire.

Herdt is aware of the implications of this problem, saying that no issue has been of greater interest in the anthropology of homosexuality than that of deciding whether such activities can be described in terms of *homoeroticism* or whether they are not just instances of social conformity (though, with the *Sambia*, social coercion would be a better term). Yet, the most he does to try to respond to this issue of "great interest" is to state "it is a necessary redundancy to say that without sexual excitement—as signified by erections in the inspirer and bawdy enthusiasm in the inspired

boy—these social practices would not only lie beyond the erotic, but more elementary, would not exist" (p. 279). But this argument is fallacious on several accounts. First, it is false that without sexual excitement a social practice would lie beyond the erotic, if by erotic one means (as Herdt does) sexual desire. For, as several researchers have shown, there is no necessary connection between the two: one can have sexual desire without having sexual excitement and one can have sexual excitement without having sexual desire (see, e.g., Burgess, 1981; Kaplan, 1977; Reich, 1942/1971). Secondly, the fact that a child might show "bawdy enthusiasm" in sexually satisfying an older person is hardly indicative of the child's behavior being motivated by sexual excitement or desire. As is well known, child victims of adult or adolescent sexual abuse are often willing, and even enthusiastic, participants in the sexual acts that they are manipulated into performing (Travers, 1999). Here, the motivation is frequently a desire for the adult's approval and love or fear of rejection. In the *Sambia* context, the children who suck the flute or symbolic penis, and also real penises, are warmly praised and approved of by the adult males. Further, *Sambia* boys are led to believe that they will not grow into strong men—objects of high regard in *Sambia* culture—if they do not perform fellatio. All of this suggests that it is quite unwarranted to interpret the child's enthusiasm in carrying out the act as being indicative of sexual excitement or desire.

Lest it be thought that Herdt's view is supported by his further claim that "some" of the older boy fellators experience erections while performing fellatio, it is important to note that the only example he gives of such a boy is one who, when he grew up, failed to make the prescribed transition to heterosexuality. As a man, he never desired or had sexual intercourse with any of his four successive wives (all of whom left him), had a strong aversion to women, and sexually daydreamed about young boys, continuing to seek them out long after *Sambia* cultural rules dictated he should be exclusively heterosexual. Moreover, he even broke the strict taboos by reversing the roles and trying himself to perform fellatio on the young boys, all of who refused and were disturbed or amused by the incident (not, it should be noted, sexually excited by it). In other words, the only example we are given of someone who, as an older boy fellator, had erections while performing fellatio is someone who is an exclusive homosexual. But this is uninteresting. What Herdt has to do to support his argument is to give us examples of men who happily made the transition to exclusive heterosexuality but nevertheless had erections earlier while performing fellatio. By not giving even one such example, Herdt only creates suspicions that the rest of the "some" who had such erections—if "some" here means more than one (and

it might well not)—were also, like this man, homosexual. It also cannot escape notice here that the childhood of this Sambia exclusive homosexual—with his rejecting and absent father, lack of any male role model, and a mother who resented men and discouraged her son from partaking in male activities—fits remarkably well with psychoanalytic accounts of the genesis of male homosexuality (see Fisher, 1989).

A third problem is that although Herdt tells us here that boys performing the fellatio show bawdy enthusiasm, this goes against what he says elsewhere. When initially presenting his data, Herdt says “despite great social pressures, some boys evince from the start a low interest, and they seldom participate in fellatio; on the other hand, some novices feverishly join in. Those are the two extremes: the great majority of Sambia boys regularly engage in fellatio for years, as constrained by taboo” (pp. 108–109). This statement makes it clear that, if there is bawdy enthusiasm shown in the performance of fellatio, it is only shown by a minority of boys at the extreme end of the continuum. Consequently, even if we allowed that the child’s enthusiasm was acceptable evidence for the existence of sexual desire (which it is not), we would only have evidence for the existence of such desire in a minority of the Sambia boys (it is in just such a minority that one might expect to find those “some” who had erections while performing fellatio).

As for Herdt’s claim that the erections signify sexual excitement in the “inspirer” (a question-begging term for an older boy who is receiving fellatio), this too is completely unwarranted. As Kaplan (1977) points out, persons with exclusive homosexual desires can learn to become excited and even have orgasms in a heterosexual encounter. And the same is true for heterosexual persons in a homosexual encounter, as often occurs in prison settings (see, e.g., Ward & Kassenbaum, 1964). What makes this possible is the use of sexual fantasy (it is because of this that fantasy and desire, rather than behavior, should be seen as the true indicator of sexual orientation; see Giles, 2004). Thus, if a heterosexual adolescent boy is fantasizing that the young boy who is performing fellatio on him is a girl, then he might well be able to become sexually excited and have an erection. The fact that young Sambia males are not only forbidden to touch females, but also forbidden to masturbate (along with the fact that the majority accept heterosexuality with open arms when they are at last allowed to), strongly suggests that some such fantasizing is used by the Sambia adolescent. In Western culture, an adolescent heterosexual male with no sexual access to females typically engages in masturbation while fantasizing about sexual interaction with a girl (there are, of course, other reasons for masturbating too, but this at least is one of them). If such a person who had no access

to females were also prohibited from masturbating and, at the same time, coerced into turning to young boys who are readily available to perform fellatio, it might well seem to him that a reasonable solution to his dilemma would be to allow fellatio to be performed on him by the boy while fantasizing he was being fellated by or having sexual intercourse with a girl. Could not this be exactly what is happening in the Sambia case? This interpretation seems so obvious that it is remarkable that Herdt never considers it. Further, Herdt’s data will not let us decide against this interpretation because his data contain no information on whether and to what extent Sambia adolescent males are fantasizing in their sexual encounters with the young boys. In his own (or perhaps Stoller’s) words, his data are “fantasy-impoverished” and thus “not satisfactory” (Stoller & Herdt, 1985, p. 404).

In the final pages of the book, Herdt at last admits that although he has been “approaching” the question of how erotic ritualized homosexual relations really are, he has also been avoiding it. His reason for doing so, he tells us, is because answering such a question would require the space for an essay unto itself (even though the entire last chapter which deals with just this question is an essay unto itself). Another reason, we are told, is that “the questions raised regarding the erotic aspect require us to venture into philosophical debates: namely, is the personal erotic desire the culturally collective sexual desire” (p. 292). But what is wrong with venturing into this debate? And if venturing into this debate is required to answer the question, and Herdt has not ventured into it, then plainly he has not answered the question. And if he has not answered the question, then it is misleading for him to imply that he has, by calling prescribed homosexual acts “homoeroticism,” by making claims about Sambia sexual culture fundamentally splitting apart desires, and by otherwise implying that his work addresses “questions raised regarding the erotic aspect.”

None of this is to say that Herdt’s book is not useful: it is packed with fascinating data and full of numerous insights. Nor is it to imply that culture does not play a role in determining how and when people carry out their sexual activities. It is, however, to say that nothing in Herdt’s book provides a convincing argument for what appears to be the main conclusion, namely that Sambia sexual culture has “fundamentally split apart desires” or dictated the directions they should take. That Sambia sexual culture plays but a minimal role in “scripting” or affecting the sexual desires of the Sambia also follows from the fact that, as I have argued elsewhere (Giles, 2004), sexual desire is an existential need that has its origins in the unique features of human consciousness, features that are common to all human beings across all cultures.

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**Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics.** By Shane Phelan. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, 190 pp., \$17.95.

*Reviewed by Ailsa Craig, Ph.D. Candidate<sup>2</sup>*

Anyone who has spent much time in lesbian and gay organizations has seen the splintering, damaging effects of an identity politics gone wrong. Organizations get caught in accusations and arguments about being exclusive or misrepresenting the community they claim to speak for. What might have been a productive gathering is soon reduced to in-fighting that drives many away from political action or community involvement. The point is not, however, that we should all agree, but that somewhere along the line, identity politics narrowed our political gaze

and became about essential identities and maintenance of boundaries rather than political action rooted in individual experience.

In this volume, Phelan addresses the problem of restoring and broadening political and theoretical possibilities for identity politics. She also shows how postmodern theory and political action are not mutually exclusive, as detractors of postmodern theory often claim. Phelan's writing is energetic and compelling, with phrases and passages that can serve as aphorisms in their own right. For example: "Being a tomboy is not an indicator of lesbianism except to those who believe that real women do not climb trees" (p. 53). Her argument is equally refreshing in its energy and her commitment to answering the question often posed of postmodern theory: "Well yes, but what should we *do*?"

Extending from arguments made in an earlier work on lesbian community (Phelan, 1989; see Rust, 1997), Phelan explores here how specificity can provide a way to reclaim the strengths of identity politics without falling prey to the false unity of identitarian politics. Phelan's specificity involves a reflexivity that acknowledges social location while also acknowledging that people are not reducible to categories. For Phelan, getting specific means approaching political work from our various and individual social locations in a way that takes the specifics of our lives into account—without creating monolithic categories of identity that end up standing in for more personal and multiple articulations of political goals, commitments, or values. As she simply states it: "We are specific individuals as well as members of multiple groups" (p. 11).

Phelan's focus on specificity allows her to explore in detail how unity can and should be seen as an *achievement* of identity politics, not a given, since there is no generic voice (lesbian or otherwise). Indeed, Phelan compellingly articulates how any claim to being a generic person simply works to identify the speaker as privileged. How then, does this differ from a politics of difference, an approach that has often been embraced by lesbian communities trying to incorporate diversity into their theoretically unified identity? Phelan argues that it is the insistence within the rubric of specificity that *all* community members assert and explore the specifics of their social location, not just those who are "different." Variation from the "norm" (read: those privileged enough to not have to explain their existence) is therefore not the sole realm requiring attentive articulation if one's focus is specificity instead of difference.

Phelan also argues that a coalitional politics of addition where different identities are tacked on to the names of organizations too often adds the categories but neglects to address the specifics of people's lives and their differing experiences of power. Here we are reminded of

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the lengthy lists incorporated into mission statements and organization titles, lists like “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, queer, and questioning.” Although the name may be inclusive, the politics of the organization often fail to be and face accusations of being exclusionary that can splinter the group and result in infighting that focuses on the differences among members as problems rather than sources of strength and possibility. Even the shorter “lesbian and gay” “too often heralds a return to male-dominated politics” (p. xi), since feminist lesbians are expected to privilege their homosexuality over their feminism as the difference that unites them under the umbrella of “lesbian and gay.” Rather than working for liberation, or acting as consumers of rights, Phelan argues that lesbians need to work for power and assert their democratic citizenship.

But what is it about getting specific as a rubric for political involvement and democratic community that is particularly important for postmodern lesbians? Phelan asserts that “The most striking thing about lesbians is not our difference(s) from heterosexuals or something distinctive about lesbian cultures and communities; it is our diversity” (p. 100). Indeed, she notes that the dispersal and diversity of lesbians has made creating and fighting for a common political agenda a difficult task, and Phelan argues that the two major discourses on lesbianism (lesbian feminism of the 1970s and poststructuralist challenges to lesbian identity) have failed to provide an adequate space for or vision of pro-lesbian democratic society, community, or citizenship. Phelan incorporates her own personal location in two “interludes” of the book. The first follows how the lines of class have affected her life and political thought; whereas the second is a brief discussion of her own experiences, thoughts, and visions of lesbian and gay activism. The difficulty of “getting specific” is made clear by Phelan’s choice to separate her personally reflexive thoughts and arguments from the broader theoretical arguments and claims made in the rest of the book. Indeed, her impulse to make her personal narratives “interludes” in the primary text shows how hard it is to break the habit of privileging theory over narrative. Nonetheless, Phelan’s analysis provides compelling guidance and tangible direction for a democratic politics that does not rely on modern definitions of an essentialized or unified self.

Although her discussions of employing specificity are sometimes vague in their direction, her theoretical discussions sometimes feel as if they are too tangled in specifics as she refutes intricacies of arguments with detail and precision so fine that one loses track of the larger rubric she proposes—but then, that is precisely her point. Attending to the specificity of social location needs to take priority over the application of grand theory that

too easily erases the lives of the people it purports to “liberate.”

Overall, the weaknesses mentioned speak to the reality that it is much harder to theorize heterogeneous identities than it is to live them. In living, it all gets done and we are not confused. In theorizing, there is always something that seems to be left behind. The page is, after all, fit for linear expression, and we do not live from left to right or in the pleasing arc of story or crafted argument. Given these difficulties, Phelan has produced an enviable, beautifully crafted and compelling articulation of postmodern theory, political action, and democratic citizenship.

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**Sex Changes: The Politics of Transgenderism.** By Pat Califia. Cleis Press, San Francisco, California, 1997, 307 pp., \$16.95.

Reviewed by Kathy Sisson, M.A.,<sup>3</sup>  
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“What if gender was no longer a marker for privilege? Who would you be if you had never been punished for gender-inappropriate behavior? What would it be like to live in a society where you could take a vacation from gender?” (p. 277). Califia concludes this book with these and other provocative questions. In antecedent chapters, Califia traces the historical evolution of transsexuality/transgenderism from medical curiosity to politicized minority culture. A powerful blend of political activism and personal disclosure infuses the extensive review and critique of the gender literature, and the accompanying sociocultural analysis of transsexual/transgender cultural formation.

In writing this review, we encountered two linguistic dilemmas. For readability, we collapsed the concepts of gender dysphoria, transgenderism, transsexuality, transvestism, and other nonstandard forms of gender expression with one abbreviation: TG. We recognize and apologize for the oversimplification of the subtleties those discrete terms convey. The second problem relates to Califia’s

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decision, after completing this book, to initiate female-to-male gender transition. Califia now lives and works full-time as Patrick. In the book, Califia professes an uneasy acceptance of her conflicted gender feelings and, at the time, rejected gender transition. In congruence with his gender while writing *Sex Changes*, we use female pronouns to reference him as the book's author and male pronouns to reference him posttransition. The English language, like most languages, is woefully inadequate to deal with gender ambiguity; neuter pronouns would certainly facilitate gender-related discourse.

Califia, exemplifying the gnome "personal is political," begins by disclosing her "profound discomfort with sex-role conditioning" (p. 2), and identifying as a "gender outlaw" (p. 7). She recounts her personal struggle with gender dysphoria, her investigation of sex reassignment, and her resignation to "a sort of psychic hermaphroditism" (p. 5). Her own gender dysphoria obviously provided a fundamental impetus for writing the book.

Califia conceptualizes TG cultural formation primarily as movement from object to subject—from TG individuals appropriated as objects for study by an array of "experts," to a TG activist community speaking subjectively and defining its own political agenda. She challenges the objectivity of the "objective outsider who, because of a sheaf of credentials, purports to have a point of view that is more important or powerful than that of transgendered people themselves" (p. 1).

Califia deconstructs TG cultural evolution into two discrete "waves" of TG activism: the first extending from the early 1950s to the mid-1990s, and the second from the mid-1990s to the present. The "first wave" comprises several early transsexual autobiographers, which Califia credits with the founding of early TG activism. She criticizes their desires to pass as members of their chosen gender, to distinguish themselves from homosexuals, and their obeisance to medical professionals. She castigates the early "gender scientists" (p. 52), the feminist "transphobes" (p. 86), and gay male social scientists, suggesting that they assumed self-aggrandizing, privileged vantage points from which to appropriate and define TG issues.

Califia excoriates the "gender scientists," in particular Harry Benjamin, Richard Green, and John Money, for standing as gatekeepers to sex reassignment and for defining transsexuality as psychopathology: "These people inappropriately apply a medical model of health and disease to gender identity and pleasure seeking" (p. 80) and "would have absolutely no ethical problem with genetically engineering transsexuals out of existence" (p. 81). She acknowledges that Benjamin and Green demonstrated certain sympathies with their transsexual patients, but

harshly criticizes John Money, despite his numerous contributions to the field.

Califia specifically condemns two feminist writers, Janet Raymond and Catherine Millot, as irrational "transphobes" in academic costume and their antitranssexual treatises as diatribes cloaked in feminist theory. Both Raymond and Millot decry sex-reassignment surgery; Raymond equates it with foot binding and infibulation, and Millot regards it "in simplistic Freudian terms, as castration" (p. 109). Califia, herself, a renowned feminist thinker, skewers their brand of fundamentalist and exclusionary feminism; her antipathy resonates throughout this part of the book.

Califia also challenges gay male social scientists, singling out Jonathan Katz, Walter Williams, and Will Roscoe, as another faction of "experts" appropriating transsexuality for political mileage. Califia accuses them of (mis)appropriating historical bisexuals and transsexuals in a "drive to normalize homosexuality by simply documenting its widespread existence" (p. 121) and of misrepresenting Native American berdaches as "gay role models who have absolutely nothing to do with transgenderism" (p. 127).

Califia contrasts the earlier "transsexual pioneers" (p. 163) whose goal was to gain "social acceptance" (p. 245) with the "modern transgendered activists" (p. 163). The modern activists actively challenged the status quo of gender dimorphism, the premise that TG was a form of psychopathology, and the continuing attempts by outside experts to appropriate and define the TG agenda.

The second wave of TG activism emerged in the mid-1990s, concurrent with several social developments: (1) an expanding TG community and the increasing dissatisfaction with traditional gender clinics and sex-reassignment processes; (2) the increasing visibility of other sexual minority communities; (3) Brandon Teena's murder (for being a female-to-male transsexual); (4) the Michigan Womyn's Festival's exclusion of a TG woman; and (5) the 1996 European Court of Justice ruling preventing employment discrimination against transsexuals. Califia finds this second wave of transsexual literature more representative of TG experiences and concerns. Those include challenging (before the European Commission for Human Rights) the British government's refusal to allow changes to birth certificates, identifying and confronting issues concerning partners of TG individuals, and exploding binary gender constructs. She specifically cites Mark Rees, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Leslie Feinberg, and Kate Bornstein as important second wave authors and activists.

In the final chapter of the book, Califia speculates on the future of TG activism and culture. She predicts ongoing advocacy for removal of Gender Identity Disorder

from the *DSM*, increased access to sex-reassignment procedures, and improvement in posttransition outcome (particularly for sexual satisfaction). Drawing on her experiences with lesbian feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, Califia cites identity politics as the most divisive issue facing the TG community: "There will probably continue to be conflict between transsexuals who see the sex-reassignment process confirming their true gender, and transgendered people who believe that their only hope for liberation lies in dismantling biological sex itself" (p. 275).

Califia envisions an admittedly utopian social order resulting from a broad alliance of transactivists, which would encompass anyone whose individuality and potential has been compromised by coercive sex role expectations. With her concluding provocative questions about gender and sex role conformity, Califia illuminates the insidious "gender tyranny" (p. 276) into which we are all unwittingly socialized.

As with many literature reviews, this book occasionally verges on the tediously meticulous. Califia dissects the available literature at length and casual readers may grow impatient with the level of minutiae she examines; however, she often rescues these sections with her trademark barbed and pithy sociopolitical commentary. Califia's personal experiences and observations ground her theoretical analysis and explain the emotion underpinning it. Yet, Califia's emotions sometimes cloud her judgment. The early gender researchers and TG individuals faced historical and societal constraints that she fails to acknowledge; she ignores the courage and innovation these gender pioneers exhibited. With the wisdom of hindsight and interceding years of research, we now realize their original concepts bore certain flaws; however, their ideas were revolutionary at the time. This lack of perspective does mar an otherwise outstanding review of the literature.

We heartily recommend this book to any sexologist, and especially to anyone embarking on a gender research project; it is well suited for college and postgraduate courses, and lay audiences will find it readable. Despite recent research, which renders the book slightly outdated, professionals will find it informative. In short, we believe this is an important, incisive, and definitive study of poorly understood phenomena.

Although historical and cross-cultural evidence indicates that the individuals we would label today as transsexual and transgendered have existed for millennia, modern constructs of transsexuality and transgenderism are nascent. *Sex Changes* lays a comprehensive historical and scientific foundation for the TG culture currently under construction. We hope Califia continues contributing to the TG literature. His voice is well worth hearing.

**Transgender Care: Recommended Guidelines, Practical Information & Personal Accounts.** By Gianna E. Israel and Donald E. Tarver. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1997, 304 pp., \$24.95.

*Reviewed by Lydia A. Sausa, Ph.D.*<sup>4</sup>

In a time in which the transgender (trans) movement is growing stronger, though still facing constant challenges (such as lack of legal protection against discrimination and harassment, lack of health care services which meet the specific needs of trans clients, inadequate policies to address issues in schools and in employment, and concerns over a general ignorance in our society about trans people), Israel and Tarver bring us this wonderful book. It is a comprehensive resource providing background information as well as formal recommendations for professionals and consumers concerning the psychological, hormonal, surgical, and social support of transgender-identified individuals.

The book is uniquely divided into two sections. The first part is written by Israel and Tarver, in conjunction with a review committee of professionals and consumers of 21 members. Together, they address current health care issues, such as vocabulary and language, mental health services, hormone administration, surgery, HIV/AIDS, cultural diversity, trans youth, and support tools. Specific recommendations and guidelines are included in many of these chapters to assist readers in implementing appropriate standards of care for trans people.

The second section, consisting of 13 thought-provoking essays from health care professionals and trans people themselves, further explores the issues of psychotherapists as gatekeepers to hormones and surgery for trans people, insurance coverage for hormones and surgery, unique perspectives of trans youth, concerns about discrimination and the establishment of new city protection ordinances, and critiques of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) Standards of Care, as well as the guidelines proposed even within this book.

This book takes a brave step closer to recognizing trans people (long considered passive patients within the medical and health care industry) as true consumers of health care who deserve knowledgeable and trained health care providers who can meet their servicing needs. The contributors to this book do an excellent job highlighting today's problems with current health services, such as

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lack of access to services and information, an imbalance of power between consumer and provider over services, lack of support tools for providers and practitioners, and provide the readers with the knowledge and tools necessary to educate and empower both themselves and consumers. In addition, the book also recognizes and understands its own limitations. Israel and Tarver note within the introduction, “*Transgender Care* is the first resource of its kind, and it addresses some very current issues; thus, it should not be misconstrued as the ‘final word’ regarding transgender support, but, rather, as a catalyst encouraging further inquiry, growth, and change by consumers and care providers alike” (p. 5).

This book falls short in two specific areas. First, is in the area of language usage and inclusiveness, second in providing guidelines for health care providers which truly empower trans people. Israel and Tarver provide the reader with common definitions of a variety of labels or subpopulations among the vast and diverse trans community, including transsexuals, transgenderists, androgynes, intersexed, and drag performers. They also warn that “care providers and consumers are advised that usage of labels is inherently risky, particularly because no single reference can include all the needs of each individual. Identification as a transgender individual or as belonging in any one transgender subpopulation remains the responsibility solely of the person exploring his or her own gender-identity issues” (p. 14). However, many times throughout the text they assume an “opposite gender” (p. 14), and when proposing guidelines for recommending hormones or surgery refer to only FTM’s or MTF’s, though there are other trans people who choose to augment their body though these methods who may not identify within such subpopulations.

The second concern is that though Israel and Tarver intended to improve and clarify current health care guidelines or create new guidelines for providers to ultimately empower trans people, in many instances they provide inconsistent recommendations which do not empower trans people regarding hormone dosage, self-injections, requirements of living “in role” for surgery, and requiring therapists to evaluate all trans people for a minimum of 3 months before receiving forms of body modification.

When discussing injectable hormones, such as testosterone, Israel and Tarver provide an exact dosage of “200 mg twice monthly,” which is common, but do not mention the fact that many trans people may choose a lower dose or that an individual’s dose may need to be specific to that person’s health concerns, current health status, or the individual’s personal desired outcome of hormone use, and therefore may need to be assessed between physician and client on a case-to-case basis. Furthermore,

they go on to say that with regard to testosterone injections that “self-administration is not advised during the first three months of initial hormone administration because of the necessity for the physician to monitor effects” (p. 67). Thus, within the first 3 months of hormone usage, it would be required that trans people see a doctor every 2 weeks for a simple injection. Many trans people do not have insurance and seeing a physician every 2 weeks may be costly, time consuming, and even unnecessary if the physician and client both feel comfortable self-injecting and coming in for a check up or if a problem arises.

As part of the recommendations for surgery, Israel and Tarver’s guidelines state that “both MTF and FTM consumers are strongly advised where at all possible to undertake a minimum six-month, full-time real-life test prior to undergoing any aesthetic surgical procedure” (p. 80), and have “consistently lived in the new gender role full time for one complete year . . . living in role full time equates to twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, continuously” (p. 95). However, both the authors and contributors to this book have stated the problems with requiring a person to live full-time in a gender role, such as employment issues, the risks of additional visibility leading to harassment or attack of violence, and the fact that the trans individual may not want to live full time as a man or woman though may desire surgery to modify their body. Thus, the authors are imposing restrictions which may not be helpful and in some cases maybe harmful for trans people.

Finally, Israel and Tarver require psychotherapeutic professionals to regulate trans people’s access to surgical and hormonal body modifications. Stryker, in one of the essays presented in this book, put it best:

What is at stake here is who has the power to determine how one’s body is treated. There is no middle ground; either one has this power oneself in any given situation, or one doesn’t. As transgender medical services are currently delivered in the United States, it is the psychotherapist, not the transsexual, who ultimately determines what will happen to the transsexual’s body. This is an unacceptable situation. (p. 244)

Though the book takes three brave steps forward to propel innovations among health care services for trans people, the authors sometimes take one step back by providing a more conservative framework which in the long run still disempowers trans people.

In spite of the weaknesses, *Transgender Care* is a strong and comprehensive tool for anyone interested in learning more about trans people and their health care needs. I highly recommend this book and have many times not only as a professional consultant who has conducted many workshops and trainings about trans people for

health care organizations and schools, but also as a trans person myself.

**Sexually Aggressive Children: Coming to Understand**

**Them.** By Sharon K. Araji. Sage, Thousand Oaks, California, 1997, 245 pp., \$43.95.

*Reviewed by Karen L. Siegel, Ph.D.*<sup>5</sup>

This is an engaging book on a very troubling subject that has been, hitherto, frequently overlooked just because the topic is so emotionally provocative. Araji's volume summarizes the past 15 years of clinical research and treatment of children (defined as under the age of 12 years) with sexually aggressive behavior problems. In her comprehensive overview of this nascent research field, she compassionately weaves and integrates definitions, statistical analyses, social demographics, and psychological characteristics of this too-often neglected population, theories of causation, reviews known programs and "best practices," and calls for a "systemwide response" that will "close the cracks" and make prevention our top priority.

Friedrich, a major contributor in this field, Friedrich penned the "appreciative" Foreword, focusing on eight key issues that Araji sensitively explores. These include: labeling and defining considerably diverse sexually aggressive children; sexual abuse and trauma as not a new phenomenon, but universally un/underacknowledged; the politicizing of adult sexual aggression and the counterproductive danger of "borrowing" too much from findings on adult offenders; citing developmental psychopathology as the most appropriate framework for understanding the causative factors of childhood sexual aggression; pathological family dynamics as contributions to aggressive sexual behaviors; sexual aggression as a consistent consequence of maltreatment, usually sexual abuse; viewing sexual aggression as a disorder of affect and behavior regulation; and lastly, the features and qualities of effective treatment programs and providers.

An impassioned plea to "Never give up hope that people, most of all children, can make dramatic changes in their lives" is made on page xxiv of the Preface, written by Gray and Pithers of The STEP Program/Center for Prevention Services, in Williston, Vermont. They call on concerned, responsible adults "invested in child prosperity" to "fulfill our own social contract to provide interventions that will inspire (children) to become adults with a strong sense of personal ethics."

In the Introduction that follows, Araji specifies the focus and two major objectives of her book, which are,

first, to collect and review in one place all previous available information about sexually aggressive children and to evaluate the interventions, social, and legal services for youthful sexual aggressors, with a keen eye on the systemic gaps that merit addressing. By providing a synthesis and critical analysis of each chapter's information, Araji aims to meet her second objective of expanding current, primarily descriptive, publications in the field. Araji makes a compelling presentation that a comprehensive explanation of these troubled children's behaviors must be guided by the interactive perspectives of psychology, social psychology, and sociology. Next, Araji moves on to discuss why recognizing, identifying, and reporting of child sexual offending has been almost nonexistent prior to 1985, citing societal denial of childhood sexuality (cf. Bancroft, 2003) and conflicted, repressive sexual attitudes that tend to either minimize or demonize such actions. The ambivalence and confusion as to appropriate labels and definitions is explored, concluding that the term "sexually aggressive children" (not "sexual exploration" or "sexual curiosity") best describes the behaviors that do represent the extreme end of the sexual abuse continuum. Research studies that illuminate the prevalence of sexually aggressive preadolescents are cited, suggesting that most contributors believe that the prevalence of offenses is increasing while public awareness, programs, and services are still sorely lacking.

The book is organized into six chapters, beginning with a review of the professional literature that attempts to distinguish between normal, normative, appropriate sexual behaviors and sexually abusive, aggressive behaviors of youths under 12 years of age. A continuum of sexual behaviors is proposed, demonstrating that there is a progression from normal to aggressive acts which, falling at the extreme end of all continua cited, are the most resistant to interventions and treatment. The labels used by professionals varied by their theoretical perspective and discipline, with Araji correctly advising that we be keenly aware of our own professional biases and personal conceptualizations, since our thoughts and belief systems give rise to our interventions and have profound implications for their outcomes.

Chapter 2, "a natural extension" of the first, reviews the empirical studies that identified six broad social demographic categories and psychological characteristics of sexually abusive children: abuser and victim characteristics, family characteristics and environments, victimization experiences, sexual and aggressive preoccupation, school performance, and social skills and relationships. Araji's disturbing conclusion clearly cites dysfunctional, abusive families as a primary causative source of sexual aggression in children, "a high percentage of (which) were

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first victims of sexual abuse” (p. 87). An appeal is made for appropriate interventions at the preadolescent level that would, hopefully, prove more preventive of escalating adolescent sophistication and violence.

An in-depth discussion of the family, extrafamilial, and situational factors that may contribute to sexually aggressive behaviors in such young children follows in Chapter 3. Four “family environment” typologies that promote a range of sexual behaviors are herein reviewed, with the role of covert abuse still relatively ignored in the literature, compared to overt abuse. Special focus is placed on sibling incest, “widespread but commonly ignored, minimized, or underreported” (p. 117). Greater awareness of the salient, multivariate, familial, and extrafamilial causative factors of sexually aggressive children is discussed, reiterating that such knowledge is critical to the development of effective prevention, intervention, and treatment programs. Theories used to explain children’s sexually aggressive and abusive actions are critically explored in Chapter 4, still connected by the primary concept that most such behaviors are reactions to sexual abuse, while also considering the connection between physical abuse and aggression. The limitations inherent to our theories are once again cautioned against, calling on us to regard the “wide variety of behaviors on a continuum” to be accurately identified and studied.

Programs, agencies, and private practices aimed at redirecting children’s sexual abuse and aggression are pre-

sented in Chapter 5, clearly citing 10 critical factors for integrative program development and treatment planning, concluding with the recommendation for more empirical testing and evaluation of all services provided. This stimulating volume closes in Chapter 6 with stating the imperative need for a systemic response that “closes the cracks” (p. 193) in awareness, definitions, descriptions, treatments, and policies. Responses must be carefully planned and coordinated on the family, community, state, and even national levels of society, beginning with raising public awareness and acceptance of this serious social problem. Families, schools and other social agencies, legal institutions, and the media must all be recognized as major influences on such behaviors, to be integrated into meaningful solutions to this heart-wrenching challenge.

In conclusion, Araj’s book is quite successful in filling the significant need for critical review of the relevant literature while presenting varied theoretical approaches and multidisciplinary proposals for further study. This comprehensive and thought-provoking volume provides an extremely valuable resource for all who care about our “most precious resource in the world” (p. xxii)—our children.

## REFERENCES

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